

Part I

The Defeat of June, 1848

After the July Revolution, when the liberal banker Laffitte led his companion, the Duke of Orléans, in triumph to the Hotel de Ville, he let fall the words: "From now on the bankers will rule." Laffitte had betrayed the secret of the revolution.

It was not the French bourgeoisie that ruled under Louis Philippe, but one faction of it: bankers, stock-exchange kings, railway kings, owners of coal and iron mines and forests, a part of the landed proprietors associated with them — the so-called financial aristocracy. It sat on the throne, it dictated laws in the Chambers, it distributed public offices, from cabinet portfolios to tobacco bureau posts.

The industrial bourgeoisie proper formed part of the official opposition, that is, it was represented only as a minority in the Chambers. Its opposition was expressed all the more resolutely the more unalloyed the autocracy of the finance aristocracy became, and the more it imagined that its domination over the working class was insured after the revolts of 1832, 1834, and 1839, which had been drowned in blood. Grandin, a Rouen manufacturer and the most fanatical instrument of bourgeois reaction in the Constituent as well as in the Legislative National Assembly, was the most violent opponent of Guizot in the Chamber of Deputies. Leon Faucher, later known for his impotent efforts to climb into prominence as the Guizot of the French counterrevolution, in the last days of Louis Philippe waged a war of the pen for industry against speculation and its train bearer, the government. Bastiat agitated in the name of Bordeaux and the whole of wine-producing France against the ruling system.

The petty bourgeoisie of all gradations, and the peasantry also, were completely excluded from political power. Finally, in the official opposition or entirely outside the *pays legal* [electorate], there were the ideological representatives and spokesmen of the above classes, their savants, lawyers, doctors, etc., in a word, their so-called men of talent.

Owing to its financial straits, the July Monarchy was dependent from the beginning on the big bourgeoisie, and its dependence on the big bourgeoisie was the inexhaustible source of increasing financial straits. It was impossible to subordinate the administration of the state to the interests of national production without

balancing the budget, without establishing a balance between state expenditures and revenues. And how was this balance to be established without limiting state expenditures — that is, without encroaching on interests which were so many props of the ruling system — and without redistributing taxes — that is, without shifting a considerable share of the burden of taxation onto the shoulders of the big bourgeoisie itself?

On the contrary, the faction of the bourgeoisie that ruled and legislated through the Chambers had a direct interest in the indebtedness of the state. The state deficit was really the main object of its speculation and the chief source of its enrichment. At the end of each year a new deficit. After the lapse of four or five years a new loan. And every new loan offered new opportunities to the finance aristocracy for defrauding the state, which was kept artificially on the verge of bankruptcy — it had to negotiate with the bankers under the most unfavorable conditions. Each new loan gave a further opportunity, that of plundering the public which invested its capital in state bonds by means of stock-exchange manipulations, the secrets of which the government and the majority in the Chambers were privy to. In general, the instability of state credit and the possession of state secrets gave the bankers and their associates in the Chambers and on the throne the possibility of evoking sudden, extraordinary fluctuations in the quotations of government securities, the result of which was always bound to be the ruin of a mass of smaller capitalists and the fabulously rapid enrichment of the big gamblers. As the state deficit was in the direct interest of the ruling faction of the bourgeoisie, it is clear why the extraordinary state expenditure in the last years of Louis Philippe's reign was far more than double the extraordinary state expenditure under Napoleon, indeed reached a yearly sum of nearly 400,000,000 francs, whereas the whole average annual export of France seldom attained a volume amounting to 750,000,000 francs. The enormous sums which in this way flowed through the hands of the state facilitated, moreover, swindling contracts for deliveries, bribery, defalcations, and all kinds of roguery.

The defrauding of the state, practiced wholesale in connection with loans, was repeated retail in public works. What occurred in the relations between Chamber and government became multiplied in the relations between individual departments and individual entrepreneurs.

The ruling class exploited the building of railways in the same way it exploited state expenditures in general and state loans. The Chambers piled the main burdens on the state, and secured the golden fruits to the speculating finance aristocracy. One recalls the scandals in the Chamber of Deputies when by chance it leaked out that all the members of the majority, including a number of ministers, had been interested as shareholders in the very railway constructions which as legislators they had carried out afterward at the cost of the state.

On the other hand, the smallest financial reform was wrecked through the influence of the bankers. For example, the postal reform. Rothschild protested. Was it permissible for the state to curtail sources of revenue out of which interest was to be paid on its ever increasing debt?

The July Monarchy was nothing other than a joint stock company for the exploitation of France's national wealth, whose dividends were divided among ministers, Chambers, 240,000 voters, and their adherents. Louis Philippe was the director of this company — Robert Macaire [1] on the throne. Trade, industry, agriculture, shipping, the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie, were bound to be continually endangered and prejudiced under this system. Cheap government, government *a bon marche*, was what it had inscribed on its banner in the July days.

Since the finance aristocracy made the laws, was at the head of the administration of the state, had command of all the organized public authorities, dominated public opinion through the actual state of affairs and through the press, the same prostitution, the same shameless cheating, the same mania to get rich was repeated in every sphere, from the court to the Cafe Borgne [2] to get rich not by production, but by pocketing the already available wealth of others, Clashing every moment with the bourgeois laws themselves, an unbridled assertion of unhealthy and dissolute appetites manifested itself, particularly at the top of bourgeois society — lusts wherein 'wealth derived from gambling naturally seeks its satisfaction, where pleasure becomes debauched, where money, filth, and blood commingle. The finance aristocracy, in its mode of acquisition as well as in its pleasures, is nothing but the rebirth of the lumpen proletariat on the heights of bourgeois society.

And the nonruling factions of the French bourgeoisie cried: Corruption! The people cried: *A bas les grands voleurs! A bas les assassins!* [Down with the big thieves! Down with the assassins! when in 1847, on the most prominent stages of bourgeois society, the same scenes were publicly enacted that regularly lead the lumpen proletariat to brothels, to workhouses and lunatic asylums, to the bar of justice, to the dungeon, and to the scaffold. The industrial bourgeoisie saw its interests endangered, the petty bourgeoisie was filled with moral indignation, the imagination of the people was offended, Paris was flooded with pamphlets — "The Rothschild Dynasty," "Usurers Kings of the Epoch," etc. — in which the rule of the finance aristocracy was denounced and stigmatized with greater or less wit.

Rien pour la gloire! [Nothing for glory! Glory brings no profit!] *La paix partout et toujours!* [Peace everywhere and always!] War depresses the quotations of the 3 and 4 percents which the France of the Bourse jobbers had inscribed on her banner. Her foreign policy was therefore lost in a series of mortifications to French national sentiment, which reacted all the more vigorously when the rape of Poland was brought to its conclusion with the incorporation of Cracow by Austria, and when

Guizot came out actively on the side of the Holy Alliance in the Swiss separatist war. The victory of the Swiss liberals in this mimic war raised the self-respect of the bourgeois opposition in France; the bloody uprising of the people in Palermo worked like an electric shock on the paralyzed masses of the people and awoke their great revolutionary memories and passions.

The eruption of the general discontent was finally accelerated and the mood for revolt ripened by two economic world events.

The potato blight and the crop failures of 1845 and 1846 increased the general ferment among the people. The famine of 1847 called forth bloody conflicts in France as well as on the rest of the Continent. As against the shameless orgies of the finance aristocracy, the struggle of the people for the prime necessities of life! At Buzançais, hunger rioters executed; in Paris, oversatiated *escrocs* [swindlers] snatched from the courts by the royal family!

The second great economic event that hastened the outbreak of the revolution was a general commercial and industrial crisis in England. Already heralded in the autumn of 1845 by the wholesale reverses of the speculators in railway shares, staved off during 1846 by a number of incidents such as the impending abolition of the Corn Laws, the crisis finally burst in the autumn of 1847 with the bankruptcy of the London wholesale grocers, on the heels of which followed the insolvencies of the land banks and the closing of the factories in the English industrial districts. The aftereffect of this crisis on the Continent had not yet spent itself when the February Revolution broke out.

The devastation of trade and industry caused by the economic epidemic made the autocracy of the finance aristocracy still more unbearable. Throughout the whole of France the bourgeois opposition agitated at banquets for an electoral reform which should win for it the majority in the Chambers and overthrow the Ministry of the Bourse. In Paris the industrial crisis had, moreover, the particular result of throwing a multitude of manufacturers and big traders, who under the existing circumstances could no longer do any business in the foreign market, onto the home market. They set up large establishments, the competition of which ruined the small *épiciers* [grocers] and *boutiquiers* [shopkeepers] en masse. Hence the innumerable bankruptcies among this section of the Paris bourgeoisie, and hence their revolutionary action in February. It is well known how Guizot and the Chambers answered the reform proposals with an unambiguous challenge, how Louis Philippe too late resolved on a ministry. led by Barrot, how things went as far as hand-to-hand fighting between the people and the army, how the army was disarmed by the passive conduct of the National Guard, how the July Monarchy had to give way to a provisional government.

The Provisional Government which emerged from the February barricades necessarily mirrored in its composition the different parties which shared in the victory. It could not be anything but a compromise between the different classes which together had overturned the July throne, but whose interests were mutually antagonistic. The great majority of its members consisted of representatives of the bourgeoisie. The republican petty bourgeoisie was represented by Ledru-Rollin and Flocon, the republican bourgeoisie by the people from the National [3], the dynastic opposition by Crémieux, Dupont de l'Eure, etc. The working class had only two representatives, Louis Blanc and Albert. Finally, Lamartine in the Provisional Government; this was at first no real interest, no definite class; this was the February Revolution itself, the common uprising with its illusions, its poetry, its visionary content, and its phrases. For the rest, the spokesman of the February Revolution, by his position and his views, belonged to the bourgeoisie.

If Paris, as a result of political centralization, rules France, the workers, in moments of revolutionary earthquakes, rule Paris. The first act in the life of the Provisional Government was an attempt to escape from this overpowering influence by an appeal from intoxicated Paris to sober France. Lamartine disputed the right of the barricade fighters to proclaim a republic on the ground that only the majority of Frenchmen had that right; they must await their votes, the Paris proletariat must not besmirch its victory by a usurpation. The bourgeoisie allows the proletariat only one usurpation — that of fighting.

Up to noon of February 25 the republic had not yet been proclaimed; on the other hand, all the ministries had already been divided among the bourgeois elements of the Provisional Government and among the generals, bankers, and lawyers of the National. But the workers were determined this time not to put up with any bamboozlement like that of July, 1830. They were ready to take up the fight anew and to get a republic by force of arms. With this message, Raspail betook himself to the Hotel de Ville. In the name of the Paris proletariat he commanded the Provisional Government to proclaim a republic; if this order of the people were not fulfilled within two hours, he would return at the head of 200,000 men. The bodies of the fallen were scarcely cold, the barricades were not yet disarmed, and the only force that could be opposed to them was the National Guard. Under these circumstances the doubts born of considerations of state policy and the juristic scruples of conscience entertained by the Provisional Government suddenly vanished. The time limit of two hours had not yet expired when all the walls of Paris were resplendent with the gigantic historical words: *Republique française! Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité!*

Even the memory of the limited aims and motives which drove the bourgeoisie into the February Revolution was extinguished by the proclamation of the republic on the basis of universal suffrage. Instead of only a few factions of the bourgeoisie, all

classes of French society were suddenly hurled into the orbit of political power, forced to leave the boxes, the stalls, and the gallery and to act in person upon the revolutionary stage! With the constitutional monarchy vanished also the semblance of a state power independently confronting bourgeois society, as well as the whole series of subordinate struggles which this semblance of power called forth!

By dictating the republic to the Provisional Government, and through the Provisional Government to the whole of France, the proletariat immediately stepped into the foreground as an independent party, but at the same time challenged the whole of bourgeois France to enter the lists against it. What it won was the terrain for the fight for its revolutionary emancipation, but by no means this emancipation itself.

The first thing the February Republic had to do was, rather, to complete the rule of the bourgeoisie by allowing, besides the finance aristocracy, all the propertied classes to enter the orbit of political power. The majority of the great landowners, the Legitimists, were emancipated from the political nullity to which they had been condemned by the July Monarchy. Not for nothing had the Gazette de France agitated in common with the opposition papers; not for nothing had La Roche-Jaquelein taken the side of the revolution in the session of the Chamber of Deputies on February 24. The nominal proprietors, the peasants, who form the great majority of the French people, were put by universal suffrage in the position of arbiters of the fate of France. The February Republic finally brought the rule of the bourgeoisie clearly into view, since it struck off the crown behind which capital had kept itself concealed.

Just as the workers in the July days had fought for and won the bourgeois monarchy, so in the February days they fought for and won the bourgeois republic. Just as the July Monarchy had to proclaim itself a monarchy surrounded by republican institutions, so the February Republic was forced to proclaim itself a republic surrounded by social institutions. The Paris proletariat compelled this concession, too.

Marche, a worker, dictated the decree by which the newly formed Provisional Government pledged itself to guarantee the workers a livelihood by means of labor, to provide work for all citizens, etc. And when a few days later it forgot its promises and seemed to have lost sight of the proletariat, a mass of 20,000 workers marched on the Hotel de Ville with the cry: Organize labor! Form a special Ministry of labor! Reluctantly and after long debate, the Provisional Government nominated a permanent special commission charged with lending means of improving the lot of the working classes! This commission consisted of delegates from the corporations [guilds] of Paris artisans and was presided over by Louis Blanc and Albert. The Luxembourg Palace was assigned to it as its meeting place. In this way the representatives of the working class were banished from the seat of the Provisional

Government, the bourgeois part of which retained the real state power and the reins of administration exclusively in its hands; and side by side with the ministries of finance, trade, and public works, side by side with the Bank and the Bourse, there arose a socialist synagogue whose high priests, Louis Blanc and Albert, had the task of discovering the promised land, of preaching the new gospel, and of providing work for the Paris proletariat. Unlike any profane state power, they had no budget, no executive authority at their disposal. They were supposed to break the pillars of bourgeois society by dashing their heads against them. While the Luxembourg sought the philosopher's stone, in the Hôtel de Ville they minted the current coinage.

And yet the claims of the Paris proletariat, so far as they went beyond the bourgeois republic, could win no other existence than the nebulous one of the Luxembourg.

In common with the bourgeoisie the workers had made the February Revolution, and alongside the bourgeoisie they sought to secure the advancement of their interests, just as they had installed a worker in the Provisional Government itself alongside the bourgeois majority. Organize labor! But wage labor, that is the existing, the bourgeois organization of labor. Without it there is no capital, no bourgeoisie, no bourgeois society. A special Ministry of Labor! But the ministries of finance, of trade, of public works — are not these the bourgeois ministries of labor? And alongside these a proletariat Ministry of Labor had to be a ministry of impotence, a ministry of pious wishes, a Luxembourg Commission. Just as the workers thought they would be able to emancipate themselves side by side with the bourgeoisie, so they thought they would be able to consummate a proletarian revolution within the national walls of France, side by side with the remaining bourgeois nations. But French relations of production are conditioned by the foreign trade of France, by her position on the world market and the laws thereof; how was France to break them without a European revolutionary war, which would strike back at the despot of the world market, England?

As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own deeds drive it on. It makes no theoretical inquiries into its own task. The French working class had not attained this level; it was still incapable of accomplishing its own revolution.

The development of the industrial proletariat is, in general, conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. Only under its rule does the proletariat gain that extensive national existence which can raise its revolution to a national one, and only thus does the proletariat itself create the modern means of production, which become just so many means of its revolutionary emancipation. Only bourgeois rule tears up the material roots of feudal society and levels the

ground on which alone a proletarian revolution is possible. French industry is more developed and the French bourgeoisie more revolutionary than that of the rest of the Continent. But was not the February Revolution aimed directly against the finance aristocracy? This fact proved that the industrial bourgeoisie did not rule France. The industrial bourgeoisie can rule only where modern industry shapes all property relations to suit itself, and industry can win this power only where it has conquered the world market, for national bounds are inadequate for its development. But French industry, to a great extent, maintains its command even of the national market only through a more or less modified system of prohibitive duties. While, therefore, the French proletariat, at the moment of a revolution, possesses in Paris actual power and influence which spur it on to a drive beyond its means, in the rest of France it is crowded into separate, scattered industrial centers, almost lost in the superior number of peasants and petty bourgeois. The struggle against capital in its developed, modern form — in its decisive aspect, the struggle of the industrial wage worker against the industrial bourgeois — is in France a partial phenomenon, which after the February days could so much the less supply the national content of the revolution, since the struggle against capital's secondary modes of exploitation, that of the peasant against usury and mortgages or of the petty bourgeois against the wholesale dealer, banker, and manufacturer — in a word, against bankruptcy — was still hidden in the general uprising against the finance aristocracy. Nothing is more understandable, then, than that the Paris proletariat sought to secure the advancement of its own interests side by side with those of the bourgeoisie, instead of enforcing them as the revolutionary interests of society itself, that it let the red flag be lowered to the tricolor. The French workers could not take a step forward, could not touch a hair of the bourgeois order, until the course of the revolution had aroused the mass of the nation, peasants and petite bourgeois, standing between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, against this order, against the rule of capital, and had forced it to attach itself to the proletarians as its protagonists. The workers could buy this victory only through the tremendous defeat in June.

The Luxembourg Commission, this creation of the Paris workers, must be given the credit of having disclosed, from a Europe-wide tribune, the secret of the revolution of the nineteenth century: the emancipation, of the proletariat. The *Moniteur* blushed when it had to propagate officially the "wild ravings" which up to that time had lain buried in the apocryphal writings of the socialists and reached the ear of the bourgeoisie only from time to time as remote, half-terrifying, half-ludicrous legends. Europe awoke astonished from its bourgeois doze. Therefore, in the minds of the proletarians, who confused the finance aristocracy with the bourgeoisie in general; in the imagination of the good old republicans who denied the very existence of classes or, at most, admitted them as a result of the constitutional monarchy; in the hypocritical phrases of the factions of the bourgeoisie which up to

now had been excluded from power, the rule of the bourgeoisie was abolished with the introduction of the republic. At that time all the royalists were transformed into republicans and all the millionaires of Paris into workers. The phrase which corresponded to this imaginary abolition of class relations was *fraternite*, universal fraternization and brotherhood. This pleasant abstraction from class antagonisms, this sentimental reconciliation of contradictory class interests, this visionary elevation above the class struggle, this fraternite, was the real catchword of the February Revolution. The classes were divided by a mere misunderstanding, and on February 24 Lamartine christened the Provisional Government "*une gouvernement qui suspend ce mal entendu terrible qui existe entre les differentes classes*" [a government that removes this terrible misunderstanding which exists between the different classes]. The Paris proletariat reveled in this magnanimous intoxication of fraternity.

The Provisional Government, for its part, once it was compelled to proclaim the republic, did everything to make it acceptable to the bourgeoisie and to the provinces. The bloody terror of the first French republic was disavowed by the abolition of the death penalty for political offenses; the press was opened to all opinions — the army, the courts, the administration remained with a few exceptions in the hands of their old dignitaries; none of the July Monarchy's great offenders was brought to book. The bourgeois republicans of the National amused themselves by exchanging monarchist names and costumes for old republican ones. To them the republic was only a new ball dress for the old bourgeois society. The young republic sought its chief merit not in frightening, but rather in constantly taking fright itself, and in winning existence and disarming resistance by soft compliance and nonresistance. At home to the privileged classes, abroad to the despotic powers, it was loudly announced that the republic was of a peaceful nature. Live and let live was its professed motto. In addition to that, shortly after the February Revolution the Germans, Poles, Austrians, Hungarians, and Italians revolted, each people in accordance with its immediate situation. Russia and England — the latter itself agitated, the former cowed — were not prepared. The republic, therefore, had no national enemy to face. Consequently there were no great foreign complications which could fire the energies, hasten the revolutionary process, drive the Provisional Government forward or throw it overboard. The Paris proletariat, which looked upon the republic as its own creation, naturally acclaimed each act of the Provisional Government which facilitated the firm emplacement of the latter in bourgeois society. It willingly allowed itself to be employed on police service by Caussidière in order to protect property in Paris, just as it allowed Louis Blanc to arbitrate wage disputes between workers and masters. It made it a point *d'honneur* to preserve the bourgeois honor of the republic unblemished in the eyes of Europe.

The republic encountered no resistance either abroad or at home. This disarmed it. Its task was no longer the revolutionary transformation of the world, but consisted only in adapting itself to the relations of bourgeois society. As to the fanaticism with which the Provisional Government undertook this task there is no more eloquent testimony than its financial measures.

Public credit and private credit were naturally shaken. Public credit rests on confidence that the state will allow itself to be exploited by the wolves of finance. But the old state had vanished and the revolution was directed above all against the finance aristocracy. The vibrations of the last European commercial crisis had not yet ceased. Bankruptcy still followed bankruptcy.

Private credit was therefore paralyzed, circulation restricted, production at a standstill before the February Revolution broke out. The revolutionary crisis increased the commercial crisis. And if private credit rests on confidence that bourgeois production in the entire scope of its relations — the bourgeois order — will not be touched, will remain inviolate, what effect must a revolution have had which questioned the basis of bourgeois production, the economic slavery of the proletariat, which set up against the Bourse the sphinx of the Luxembourg? The uprising of the proletariat is the abolition of bourgeois credit, for it is the abolition of bourgeois production and its order. Public credit and private credit are the economic thermometer by which the intensity of a revolution can be measured. The more they fall, the more the fervor and generative power of the revolution rises.

The Provisional Government wanted to strip the republic of its anti bourgeois appearance. And so it had, above all, to try to peg the exchange value of this new form of state, its quotation on the Bourse. Private credit necessarily rose again, together with the current Bourse quotation of the republic.

In order to allay the very suspicion that it would not or could not honor the obligations assumed by the monarchy, in order to build up confidence in the republic's bourgeois morality and capacity to pay, the Provisional Government took refuge in braggadocio as undignified as it was childish. In advance of the legal date of payment it paid out the interest on the 5-percent, 4 ½-percent and 4-percent bonds to the state creditors. The bourgeois aplomb, the self-assurance of the capitalists, suddenly awoke when they saw the anxious haste with which this government sought to buy their confidence.

The financial embarrassment of the Provisional Government was naturally not lessened by a theatrical stroke which robbed it of its stock of ready cash. The financial pinch could no longer be concealed and petty bourgeois, domestic servants, and workers had to pay for the pleasant surprise which had been prepared for the state creditors.

It was announced that no more money could be drawn on savings bank books for an amount of over a hundred francs. The sums deposited in the savings banks were confiscated and by decree transformed into an irredeemable state debt. This embittered the already hard-pressed petty bourgeois against the republic. Since he received state debt certificates in place of his savings bank books, he was forced to go to the Bourse in order to sell them and thus deliver himself directly into the hands of the Bourse jobbers against whom he had made the February Revolution.

The finance aristocracy, which ruled under the July Monarchy, had its high church in the Bank. just as the Bourse governs state credit, the Bank governs commercial credit.

Directly threatened not only in its rule but in its very existence by the February Revolution, the Bank tried from the outset to discredit the republic by making the lack of credit general. It suddenly stopped the credits of the bankers, the manufacturers, and the merchants. As it did not immediately call forth a counterrevolution, this maneuver necessarily reacted on the Bank itself. The capitalists drew out the money they had deposited in the vaults of the Bank. The possessors of bank notes rushed to the pay office in order to exchange them for gold and silver.

The Provisional Government could have forced the Bank into bankruptcy without forcible interference, in a legal manner; it would have had only to remain passive and leave the Bank to its fate. The bankruptcy of the Bank would have been the deluge which in an instant would have swept from French soil the finance aristocracy, the most powerful and dangerous enemy of the republic, the golden pedestal of the July Monarchy. And once the Bank was bankrupt, the bourgeoisie itself would have had to regard it as a last desperate attempt at rescue, if the government had formed a national bank and subjected national credit to the control of the nation.

The Provisional Government, on the contrary, fixed a compulsory quotation for the notes of the Bank. It did more. it transformed all provincial banks into branches of the Banque de France and allowed bonds to the state creditors. The bourgeois aplomb, the self-assurance of the capitalists, suddenly awoke when they saw the anxious haste with which this government sought to buy their confidence.

The financial embarrassment of the Provisional Government was naturally not lessened by a theatrical stroke which robbed it of its stock of ready cash. The financial pinch could no longer be concealed and petty bourgeois, domestic servants, and workers had to pay for the pleasant surprise which had been prepared for the state creditors.

It was announced that no more money could be drawn on savings bank books for an amount of over a hundred francs. The sums deposited in the savings banks were confiscated and by decree transformed into an irredeemable state debt. This embittered the already hard-pressed petty bourgeois against the republic. Since he received state debt certificates in place of his savings bank books, he was forced to go to the Bourse in order to sell them and thus deliver himself directly into the hands of the Bourse robbers against whom he had made the February Revolution.

The finance aristocracy, which ruled under the July Monarchy, had its high church in the Bank. Just as the Bourse governs state credit, the Bank governs commercial credit.

Directly threatened not only in its rule but in its very existence by the February Revolution, the Bank tried from the outset to discredit the republic by making the lack of credit general. It suddenly stopped the credits of the bankers, the manufacturers, and the merchants. As it did not immediately call forth a counterrevolution, this maneuver necessarily reacted on the Bank itself. The capitalists drew out the money they had deposited in the vaults of the Bank. The possessors of bank notes rushed to the pay office in order to exchange them for gold and silver.

The Provisional Government could have forced the Bank into bankruptcy without forcible interference, in a legal manner; it would have had only to remain passive and leave the Bank to its fate. The bankruptcy of the Bank would have been the deluge which in an instant would have swept from French soil the finance aristocracy, the most powerful and dangerous enemy of the republic, the golden pedestal of the July Monarchy. And once the Bank was bankrupt, the bourgeoisie itself would have had to regard it as a last desperate attempt at rescue, if the government had formed a national bank and subjected national credit to the control of the nation.

The Provisional Government, on the contrary, fixed a compulsory quotation for the notes of the Bank. It did more. It transformed all provincial banks into branches of the Banque de France and allowed it to cast its net over the whole of France. Later it pledged the state forests to the Bank as a guarantee for a loan contracted from it. In this way the February Revolution directly strengthened and enlarged the bankocracy which it should have overthrown.

Meanwhile the Provisional Government was writhing under the incubus of a growing deficit. In vain it begged for patriotic sacrifices. Only the workers threw it their alms. Recourse had to be had to a heroic measure, to the imposition of a new tax. But who was to be taxed? The Bourse wolves, the bank kings, the state creditors, the *rentiers*, the industrialists That was not the way to ingratiate the republic with the bourgeoisie. That would have meant, on the one hand, to

endanger state credit and commercial credit, while on the other, attempts were made to purchase them with such great sacrifices and humiliations. But someone had to fork over the cash. Who was sacrificed to bourgeois credit? *Jacques le bonhomme*, the peasant.

The Provisional Government imposed an additional tax of 45 centimes to the franc on the four direct taxes. The government press cajoled the Paris proletariat into believing that this tax would fall chiefly on the big landed proprietors, on the possessors of the milliard granted by the Restoration. But in truth it hit the peasant class above all, that is, the large majority of the French people. They had to pay the costs of the February Revolution; in them the counterrevolution gained its main material. The 45-centime tax was a question of life and death for the French peasant. he made it a life and death question for the republic. From that moment the republic meant to the French peasant the 4 centime tax, and he saw in the Paris proletariat the spendthrift who did himself well at his expense.

Whereas the Revolution of 1789 began by shaking the feudal burdens off the peasants, the Revolution of 1848 announced itself to the rural population by the imposition of a new tax, in order not to endanger capital and to keep its state machine going.

There was only one means by which the Provisional Government could set aside all these inconveniences and jerk the state out of its old rut — a declaration of state bankruptcy . Everyone recalls how Ledru-Rollin in the National Assembly subsequently described the virtuous indignation with which he repudiated this presumptuous proposal of the Bourse Jew, Fould, now French Finance Minister. Fould had handed him the apple from the tree of knowledge.

By honoring the bills drawn on the state by the old bourgeois society, the Provisional Government succumbed to the latter. It had become the hard-pressed debtor of bourgeois society instead of confronting it as the pressing creditor that had to collect the revolutionary debts of many years. It had to consolidate the shaky bourgeois relationships in order to fulfill obligations which are only to be fulfilled within these relationships. Credit became a condition of life for it, and the concessions to the proletariat, the promises made to it, became so many fetters which had to be struck off. The emancipation of the workers — even as a phrase — became an unbearable danger to the new republic, for it was a standing protest against the restoration of credit, which rests on undisturbed and untroubled recognition of the existing economic class relations. Therefore, it was necessary to have done with the workers.

The February Revolution had cast the army out of Paris. The National Guard, that is, the bourgeoisie in its different gradations, constituted the sole power. Alone, however, it did not feel itself a match for the proletariat. Moreover, it was forced

gradually and piecemeal to open its ranks and admit armed proletarians, albeit after the most tenacious resistance and after setting up a hundred different obstacles. There consequently remained but one way out: to play off part of the proletariat against the other.

For this purpose the Provisional Government formed twenty — four battalions of Mobile Guards, each a thousand strong, composed of young men from fifteen to twenty years old. They belonged for the most part to the lumpen proletariat, which in all big towns forms a mass sharply differentiated from the industrial proletariat, a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, *gens sans et sans aveu* [men without hearth or home], varying according to the degree of civilization of the nation to which they belong, but never renouncing their *lazzaroni* character — at the youthful age at which the Provisional Government recruited them, thoroughly malleable, as capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices as of the basest banditry and the foulest corruption. The Provisional Government paid them franc 50 centimes a day; that is, it bought them. It gave them their own uniform; that is, it made them outwardly distinct from the blouse-wearing workers. In part it assigned officers from the standing army as their leaders; in part they themselves elected young sons of the bourgeoisie whose rodomontades about death for the fatherland and devotion to the republic captivated them.

And so the Paris proletariat was confronted with an army, drawn from its own midst, of 24,000 young, strong, foolhardy men. It gave cheers for the Mobile Guard on its marches through Paris. It acknowledged it to be its foremost fighters on the barricades. It regarded it as the proletarian guard in contradistinction to the bourgeois National Guard. Its error was pardonable.

Besides the Mobile Guard, the government decided to rally around itself an army of industrial workers. A hundred thousand workers, thrown on the streets by the crisis and the revolution, were enrolled by the Minister Marie in so-called national *ateliers* [workshops]. Under this grandiose name was hidden nothing else than the employment of the workers on tedious, monotonous, unproductive earthworks at a wage of 23 sous. English workhouses in the open — that is what these national *ateliers* were. The Provisional Government believed that it had formed, in them, a second proletarian army against the workers themselves. This time the bourgeoisie was mistaken in the national *ateliers*, just as the workers were mistaken in the Mobile Guard. It had created an army for mutiny.

But one purpose was achieved.

National *ateliers* was the name of the people's workshops which Louis Blanc preached in the Luxembourg Palace. Marie's *ateliers*, devised in direct antagonism to the Luxembourg, offered occasion, thanks to the common label, for a comedy of

errors worthy of the Spanish servant farce. The Provisional Government itself surreptitiously spread the report that these national *ateliers* were the discovery of Louis Blanc, and this seemed the more plausible because Louis Blanc, the prophet of the national *ateliers*, was a member of the Provisional Government. And in the half-naive, half-intentional confusion of the Paris bourgeoisie, in the artificially molded opinion of France, of Europe, these workhouses were the first realization of socialism, which was put in the pillory, with them.

In their appellation, though not in their content, the national *ateliers* were the embodied protest of the proletariat against bourgeois industry, bourgeois credit, and the bourgeois republic. The whole hate of the bourgeoisie was therefore turned upon them. It had found in them, simultaneously, the point against which it could direct the attack, as soon as it was strong enough to break openly with the February illusions. All the discontent, all the ill humor of the petty bourgeois too was directed against these national *ateliers*, the common target. With real fury they totted up the money the proletarian loafers swallowed up While their own situation was becoming daily more unbearable. A state pension for sham labor, so that's socialism! they grumbled to themselves. They sought the reason for their misery in the national *ateliers*, the declamations of the Luxembourg, the processions of the workers through Paris. And no one was more fanatic about the alleged machinations of the communists than the petty bourgeoisie, who hovered hopelessly on the brink of bankruptcy.

Thus in the approaching melee between bourgeoisie and proletariat, all the advantages, all the decisive posts, all the middle strata of society were in the hands of the bourgeoisie, at the same time as the waves of the February Revolution rose high over the whole Continent, and each new post brought a new bulletin of revolution, now from Italy, now from Germany, now from the remotest parts of southeastern Europe, and maintained the general ecstasy of the people, giving it constant testimony of a victory that it had already forfeited.

March 17 and April 16 were the first skirmishes in the big class struggle which the bourgeois republic hid under its wing.

March 17 revealed the proletariat's ambiguous situation, which permitted no decisive act. Its demonstration originally pursued the purpose of pushing the Provisional Government back onto the path of revolution, of effecting the exclusion of its bourgeois members, according to circumstances, and of compelling the postponement of the elections for the National Assembly and the National Guard. But on March 16 the bourgeoisie represented in the National Guard staged a hostile demonstration against the Provisional Government. With the cry *A bas Ledru-Rollin!* it surged to the H6tel de Ville. And the people were forced, on March 17, to shout: Long live Ledru-Rollin! Long live the Provisional Government! They were forced to take sides against the bourgeoisie in support of the bourgeois republic, which

seemed to them to be in danger. They strengthened the Provisional Government, instead of subordinating it to themselves. March 17 went off in a melodramatic scene, and whereas the Paris proletariat on this day once more displayed its giant body, the bourgeoisie both inside and outside the Provisional Government was all the more determined to smash it.

April 16 was a misunderstanding engineered by the Provisional Government in alliance with the bourgeoisie. The workers had gathered in great numbers in the Champ de Mars and in the Hippodrome to choose their nominees to the general staff of the National Guard. Suddenly throughout Paris, from one end to the other, a rumor spread as quick as lightning, to the effect that the workers had met armed in the Champ de Mars, under the leadership of Louis Blanc, Blanqui, Cabet, and Raspail, in order to march thence on the Hôtel de Ville, overthrow the Provisional Government, and proclaim a communist government. The general alarm is sounded — Ledru-Rollin, Marrast, and Lamartine later contended for the honor of having initiated this — and in an hour 100,000 men are under arms; the Hôtel de Ville is occupied at all points by the National Guard; the cry Down with the Communists! Down with Louis Blanc, with Blanqui, with Raspail, with Cabet! thunders throughout Paris. Innumerable deputations pay homage to the Provisional Government, all ready to save the fatherland and society. When the workers finally appear before the Hôtel de Ville, in order to hand over to the Provisional Government a patriotic collection they had made in the Champ de Mars, they learn to their amazement that bourgeois Paris has defeated their shadow in a very carefully calculated sham battle. The terrible attempt of April 16 furnished the excuse for recalling the army to Paris — the real purpose of the clumsily staged comedy and for the reactionary federalist demonstrations in the provinces.

On May 4 the National Assembly [4] met the result of the direct general elections, convened. Universal suffrage did not possess the magic power which republicans of the old school had ascribed to it. They saw in the whole of France, at least in the majority of Frenchmen, citoyens with the same interests, the same understanding, etc. This was their cult of the people. Instead of their imaginary people, the elections brought the real people to the light of day; that is, representatives of the different classes into which it falls. We have seen why peasants and petty bourgeois had to vote under the leadership of a bourgeoisie spoiling for a fight and of big landowners frantic for restoration. But if universal suffrage was not the miracle — working magic wand the republican worthies had taken it for, it possessed the incomparable higher merit of unchaining the class struggle, of letting the various middle strata of bourgeois society rapidly get over their illusions and disappointments, of tossing all the sections of the exploiting class at one throw to the apex of the state, and thus tearing from them their deceptive mask, whereas the monarchy with its property qualifications had let only certain factions of the

bourgeoisie compromise themselves, allowing the others to lie hidden behind the scenes and surrounding them with the halo of a common opposition.

In the Constituent National Assembly, which met on May 4, the bourgeois republicans, the republicans of the National, had the upper hand. Even Legitimists and Orléanists at first dared to show themselves only under the mask of bourgeois republicanism. The fight against the proletariat could be undertaken only in the name of the republic.

The republic dates from May 4, not from February 25 — that is, the republic recognized by the French people; it is not the republic which the Paris proletariat thrust upon the Provisional Government, not the republic with social institutions, not the vision that hovered before the fighters on the barricades. The republic proclaimed by the National Assembly, the sole legitimate republic, is a republic which is no revolutionary weapon against the bourgeois order, but rather its political reconstitution, the political reconsolidation of bourgeois society; in a word, a bourgeois republic. This contention resounded from the tribune of the National Assembly, and in the entire republican and anti-republican bourgeois press it found its echo.

And we have seen how the February Republic in reality was not and could not be other than a bourgeois republic; how the Provisional Government, nevertheless, was forced by the immediate pressure of the proletariat to announce it as a republic with social institutions; how the Paris proletariat was still incapable of going beyond the bourgeois republic otherwise than in its fancy, in imagination; how even where the republic acted in the service of the bourgeoisie when it really came to action; how the promises made to it became an unbearable danger for the new republic; how the whole life process of the Provisional Government was comprised in a continuous fight against the demands of the proletariat.

In the National Assembly all France sat in judgment upon the Paris proletariat. The Assembly broke immediately with the social illusions of the February Revolution; it roundly proclaimed the bourgeois republic, nothing but the bourgeois republic. It at once excluded the representatives of the proletariat, Louis Blanc and Albert, from the Executive Commission it had appointed; it threw out the proposal of a special Labor Ministry and received with acclamation the statement of Minister Trelat: "The question now is merely one of bringing labor back to its old conditions."

But all this was not enough. The February Republic was won by the workers with the passive support of the bourgeoisie. The proletarians rightly regarded themselves as the victors of February, and they made the arrogant claims of victors. They had to be vanquished in the streets, they had to be shown that they were worsted as soon as they did not fight with the bourgeoisie, but against the bourgeoisie. Just as the February Republic, with its socialist concessions, required a

battle of the proletariat, united with the bourgeoisie, against the monarchy, so a second battle was necessary to sever the republic from socialist concessions, to officially work out the bourgeois republic as dominant. The bourgeoisie had to refute, arms in hand, the demands of the proletariat. And the real birthplace of the bourgeois republic is not the February victory; it is the June defeat.

The proletariat hastened the decision when, on the fifteenth of May, it pushed its way into the National Assembly sought in vain to recapture its revolutionary influence, and only delivered its energetic leaders to the jailers of the bourgeoisie. // *faut en finir!* This situation must end! With this cry the National Assembly gave vent to its determination to force the proletariat into a decisive struggle. The Executive Commission issued a series of provocative decrees, such as that prohibiting congregations of people, etc. The workers were directly provoked, insulted, and derided from the tribune of the Constituent National Assembly. But the real point of the attack was, as we have seen, the national *ateliers*. The Constituent Assembly imperiously pointed these out to the Executive Commission, which waited only to hear its own plan proclaimed the command of the National Assembly.

The Executive Commission began by making admission to the national *ateliers* more difficult, by turning the day wage into a piece wage, by banishing workers not born in Paris to the Sologne, ostensibly for the construction of earthworks. These earthworks were only a rhetorical formula with which to embellish their exile, as the workers, returning disillusioned, announced to their comrades. Finally, on June 21, a decree appeared in the *Moniteur* which ordered the forcible expulsion of all unmarried workers from the national *ateliers* or their enrollment in the army.

The workers were left no choice; they had to starve or let fly. They answered on June 22. with the tremendous insurrection in which the first great battle was fought between the two classes that split modern society. It was a fight for the preservation or annihilation of the bourgeois order. The veil that shrouded the republic was torn asunder.

It is well known how the workers, with unexampled bravery and ingenuity, without leaders, without a common plan, without means and, for the most part, lacking weapons, held in check for five days the army, the Mobile Guard, the Paris National Guard, and the National Guard that streamed in from the provinces. It is well known how the bourgeoisie compensated itself for the mortal anguish it suffered by unheard — of brutality, massacring over 3000 prisoners. The official representatives of French democracy were steeped in republican ideology to such an extent that it was only some weeks later that they began to have an inkling of the significance of the June fight. They were stupefied by the gunpowder smoke in which their fantastic republic dissolved.

The immediate impression which the news of the June defeat made on us, the reader will allow us to describe in the words of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. [5]

Woe to that June! Re-echoes Europe.

The Paris proletariat was forced into the June insurrection by the bourgeoisie. This sufficed to mark its doom. Its immediate, avowed needs did not drive it to engage in a fight for the forcible overthrow of the bourgeoisie, nor was it equal to this task. The *Moniteur* had to inform it officially that the time was past when the republic saw any occasion to bow and scrape to its illusions, and only its defeat convinced it of the truth that the slightest improvement in its position remains a utopia within the bourgeois republic, a utopia that becomes a crime as soon as it wants to become a reality. In place of the demands, exuberant in form but still limited and even bourgeois in content, whose concession the proletariat wanted to wring from the February Republic, there appeared the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the Working class!

By making its burial place the birthplace of the bourgeois republic, the proletariat compelled the latter to come out forthwith in its pure form as the state whose admitted object it is to perpetuate the rule of capital, the slavery of labor. Having constantly before its eyes the scarred, irreconcilable, invincible enemy — invincible because his existence is the condition of its own life — bourgeois rule, freed from all fetters, was bound to turn immediately into bourgeois terrorism. With the proletariat removed for the time being from the stage and bourgeois dictatorship recognized officially, the middle strata of bourgeois society, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasant class, had to adhere more and more closely to the proletariat as their position became more unbearable and their antagonism to the bourgeoisie more acute, just as earlier they had to find the cause of their distress in its upsurge, so now in its defeat.

If the June insurrection raised the self-assurance of the bourgeoisie all over the Continent, and caused it to league itself openly with the feudal monarchy against the people, who was the first victim of this alliances The continental bourgeoisie itself. The June defeat prevented it from consolidating its rule and from bringing the people, half satisfied and half out of humor, to a standstill at the lowest stage of the bourgeois revolution.

Finally, the defeat of June divulged to the despotic powers of Europe the secret that France must maintain peace abroad at any price in order to be able to wage civil war at home. Thus the people's who had begun the fight for their national independence were abandoned to the superior power of Russia, Austria, and Prussian, but at the same time the fate of these national revolutions was made subject to the fate of the proletarian revolution, and they were robbed of their apparent autonomy, their independence of the great social revolution. The

Hungarian shall not be free, nor the Pole, nor the Italian, as long as the worker remains a slave!

Finally, with the victories of the Holy Alliance, Europe has taken on a form that makes every fresh proletarian upheaval in France directly coincide with a world war. The new French revolution is forced to leave its national soil forthwith and conquer the European terrain, on which alone the social revolution of the nineteenth century can be accomplished.

Thus only the June defeat has created all the conditions under which France can seize the initiative of the European revolution. Only after being dipped in the blood of the June insurgents did the tricolor become the flag of the European revolution — the *red flag*!

And we exclaim: *The revolution is dead! Long live the revolution.*

Notes

1. Robert Macaire, a swindler, is a character in Robert and Bertrand, a comedy by B. Antier and F. Lemaitre (1834).
 2. A term applied to cafes of dubious reputation.
 3. *Le National*, a liberal Paris daily.
 4. The Constituent National Assembly, in power from May 4 1848 to May 1849.
 5. Marx's article, in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* of June 29, 1848, from which he quotes here, appears on pages 147-150.
-

From: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/index.htm>

Course: The Classics

21031, Marx, Class Struggles in France, 1850, Part 1

9389 words